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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1781 (2007) of 15 October 2007, by which the Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) until 15 April 2008. It provides an update of the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, since my report dated 23 January 2008 (S/2008/38).

2. My Special Representative continued to lead the Mission. He was assisted by the Chief Military Observer, Major General Niaz Muhammad Khan Khattak (Pakistan). The strength of UNOMIG on 25 March 2008 stood at 134 military observers and 18 police officers (see annex).

II. Political process

3. During the reporting period, UNOMIG continued its efforts to help prevent the escalation of tensions in the zone of conflict and facilitate resumption of dialogue between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides. The overall approach to the settlement of the conflict remains that a successful dialogue on security, the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, economic rehabilitation and humanitarian issues would help bring about a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict, taking into account the principles contained in the document entitled "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi", its transmittal letter (see S/2002/88, para. 3) and additional ideas by the sides.

4. My Special Representative continued to maintain regular contact with both sides, and with the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, both in Tbilisi and in their capitals. Despite his efforts, the negotiation process remained suspended, as the Abkhaz side continued to insist on the withdrawal of Georgian armed personnel from the upper Kodori Valley as a precondition for the resumption of negotiations with the Georgian side.

5. On 18 and 19 February 2008, senior representatives of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General met in Geneva under the chairmanship of the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations. The purpose of the meeting was to take stock of developments in the United Nations-led peace process since their last

meeting in Bonn on 27 and 28 June 2007 (see S/2007/439, paras. 8-14) and discuss ways and means to advance the settlement of the conflict. Georgian and Abkhaz delegations took part in the discussion.

6. At that meeting, the Georgian side stressed the vital importance of the international community's commitment to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia as reflected in Security Council resolutions. It undertook to move the conflict settlement process forward through incremental steps. It noted progress in implementing measures discussed in Geneva and Bonn in 2007, including the investigation of the disappearance of David Sigua (see S/2007/588, paras. 5-7) by the Joint Fact-Finding Group, the programme for rehabilitation in the zone of conflict and the issue of missing persons. It stated, in particular, that its commitments regarding the upper Kodori Valley were fulfilled and verifiable, thanks to transparency measures such as the establishment of a UNOMIG team base there. It believed, therefore, that this issue should be removed from the agenda. Also with regard to security, the Georgian delegation suggested that outstanding issues concerning the resumption of the security dialogue could be promptly resolved. The Georgian delegation stressed that the Joint Fact-Finding Group investigations should be broadened to include 32 other cases.

7. The Georgian side stressed its readiness to elaborate and implement jointly with the Abkhaz side specific, tangible and result-oriented proposals aimed at increasing confidence, people-to-people contacts and the development of strong ties between civil societies. In this regard, the Georgian delegation emphasized its humanitarian rather than political approach to building confidence. It underlined its willingness to develop unilaterally proactive communication strategies, including through mass media, in order to decrease tensions and foster reconciliation between the Georgian and Abkhaz societies. In this context, the delegation invited the international community to assist Georgian and Abkhaz journalists in getting direct access to information. The Georgian side was ready to receive Abkhaz journalists, as a start. Among specific proposals, the Georgian side emphasized the establishment of economic links and the lifting of economic sanctions, provided that agreement was reached with the Abkhaz side on a number of issues, including modalities for the freedom of movement of people and goods, and security guarantees, including in relation to the safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees. The Georgian side stressed that joint economic activities could be the best mechanism to ensure confidence-building. In this regard, it reiterated its readiness to explore further specific means for the implementation of recommendations made in Bonn regarding maritime communications. The Georgian side also expressed its readiness to revisit, taking into account new circumstances, the package of documents prepared in 2005 on the non-use of force and the return of internally displaced persons and refugees. Overall, the Georgian side stated its intention to find new, creative approaches to the implementation of confidence-building measures.

8. The Abkhaz side noted the recent United Nations assessment, referring to my previous report, that the negotiation process was deadlocked, and invited the United Nations and the Group of Friends to revisit accordingly their approach to the settlement of the conflict. In particular, the Abkhaz side stressed the need for international intermediaries to take into account in a more balanced way the international principles of self-determination and territorial integrity, particularly in the light of recent decisions on Kosovo. To this end, it proposed that future

comprehensive settlement negotiations use as a basis the Abkhaz position paper "Key to the Future", submitted in 2006, rather than the "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi" (see para. 3 above).

9. At the same time, the Abkhaz side stressed its intention to continue to cooperate with the United Nations-led peace process and fulfil its commitments under the framework of the peace process. In particular, the Abkhaz delegation reaffirmed its commitment to the implementation of the confidence-building measures proposed by the Friends. It stressed the main issues apt to improve confidence between the parties and, to a large extent, the credibility of the negotiation itself, such as the full implementation of the Moscow Agreement with regard to the Kodori Valley, the non-use of force and the lifting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) embargo. In this respect, the Abkhaz side stressed its flexibility in finding compromises on these issues, including the gradual establishment of a local police force in the upper Kodori Valley, with international assistance if required; and the adoption of the already negotiated package of documents on non-use of force and the return of internally displaced persons. With regard to other confidence-building measures identified at Bonn, the Abkhaz side stressed its own record of implementation. It also suggested that the proposals identified at Bonn should be implemented before new proposals are considered. Finally the Abkhaz delegation clarified that the issuance of Abkhaz passports would continue to take place on a strictly voluntary basis.

10. The Group of Friends noted the relative quiet on the ceasefire line over the past few months and stressed the importance of cooperation by the two sides in maintaining and enhancing the security situation. In this connection, they reiterated their urgent call for the resumption as soon as possible of the security meetings between the sides, UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force, which constitutes a basic requirement for cooperation and confidence. With regard to confidence-building, the Friends expressed their disappointment at the lack of progress made since the Bonn meeting in June 2007 and stressed the importance of implementing fully the proposals for confidence-building measures made by the Friends in February 2007 and endorsed by the Security Council.

11. At the same time, the Friends noted the fact that there appeared to be common ground with regard to the necessity, after one year of escalating mistrust, to focus on the gradual restoration of a working relationship between the sides across a range of issues. The Friends encouraged the two sides to take a pragmatic approach in this respect. They took note of a number of new proposals by the Georgian side but cautioned against creating linkages that would make it more difficult to achieve concrete results. They reiterated their commitment to monitor closely the implementation of the assurances given by the sides. The Friends also recalled that international expertise was available to the sides in addressing more technical issues on their agenda and offered their concrete support on trade and communication issues. The Friends stressed the importance they attach to the preservation of peace. They reaffirmed as fundamentally important the right of return for all the refugees and internally displaced persons to Abkhazia, Georgia, and encouraged the sides to focus on practical steps to improve conditions for returns, in the first instance to the Gali district. In this context, they noted with interest the possibility of a consideration of the package of documents on the non-use of force and the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, and encouraged the two sides to finalize it as soon as possible.

12. The Friends welcomed the reaffirmation by both sides of their commitment to the United Nations-led peace process. While stressing that responsibility for the success of the conflict resolution mechanisms rests with the parties themselves, they stated their own determination to continue to assist the two sides and the United Nations in the framework of the Security Council resolutions.

13. On 4 March, the de facto Abkhaz Parliament adopted a statement that supported the suspension of negotiations with the Georgian side until the withdrawal of Georgian forces from the upper Kodori Valley. Furthermore, it called upon the de facto leadership to take measures to re-establish Abkhaz "jurisdiction" over the upper Kodori Valley. On 7 March, the de facto Parliament appealed to the United Nations, international organizations and States, in particular the Russian Federation, to consider recognition of Abkhazia's independence.

14. On 6 March, the Russian Federation announced that, due to changed circumstances, it no longer considered itself bound by the restrictions introduced by the Decision of the CIS Council of Heads of State on measures to settle the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, of 19 January 1996 (A/51/62-S/1996/74). It proposed to other CIS countries to do the same. Georgia considered the decision as an overt attempt to infringe upon its sovereignty and territorial integrity and warned about possible practical implications of lifting the CIS restrictions; in particular, regarding the acquisition of property and investments and the deployment of foreign military instructors, military forces and hardware. It declared a "policy of zero tolerance towards the militarization of Abkhazia, Georgia" and pledged to work with the international community to prevent complications.

15. On 15 March, the Georgian leadership reiterated Georgia's commitment to settling its internal conflicts by peaceful means, but opposed signing new documents on the non-use of force in the conflict settlement process, stating that earlier ceasefire agreements had resulted in the loss of Abkhazia.

16. On 13, 19 and 21 March, the Russian State Duma held hearings on Abkhaz and South Ossetian appeals for recognition of their independence. On 21 March, the Duma adopted a statement that, while expressing support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, deemed necessary an adjustment in the policy of the Russian Federation, in light of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. The Duma called on the executive branch to strengthen its assistance to and protection of Russian citizens living in Abkhazia, particularly in view of the bid by Georgia to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It stressed the need to maintain existing peacekeeping formats until an agreed settlement of the conflict was reached and to consider the possible strengthening of the peacekeeping force. It also proposed that the executive branch consider the expediency of recognizing Abkhazia's independence.

17. On 24 March, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia assessed the statement of the Duma as an attempt to interfere openly in the internal affairs of Georgia, expressing particular concern at the call by the Duma to consider the expediency of recognition of Abkhazia. It believed that the statement indicated that the Russian Federation had deprived itself of any right to claim the role of a neutral mediator in the conflict resolution. It also warned that any modification in the deployment of the CIS peacekeeping force without the consent of the Georgian authorities in Abkhazia would constitute an act of aggression against the State of Georgia.

18. On 28 March, President Saakashvili outlined Georgia's proposals for the resolution of the conflict. They included: unlimited autonomy and wide federalism, supported by international guarantees; broad Abkhaz political representation in the official structures of Georgia, including a new post of Vice-President to be occupied by an Abkhaz; the right to veto legislation and decisions related to the constitutional status of Abkhazia, Georgia, and to issues related to Abkhaz culture, language and ethnicity; the establishment of jointly controlled free economic zones in the Gali and Ochamchira districts; and the gradual merger of law enforcement and customs services. He also suggested that the Russian Federation become, together with other members of the international community, a mediator to the conflict. The de facto Abkhaz leadership stated that these proposals were not acceptable and confirmed its position that building good-neighbourly relations with Georgia on an equal basis was the only subject it was prepared to consider.

III. Developments in the UNOMIG area of responsibility

19. During the reporting period, the situation along the ceasefire line generally remained calm, with occasional spikes of tension. That was particularly the case following the detention of three Georgians by de facto Abkhaz authorities, including a journalist, a cameraman and his mother, in Gali on 26 February, and an explosion in the village of Nabakevi in the Gali sector on 29 February, which injured three de facto Abkhaz militia personnel. These developments led to a build-up of security forces on both sides of the ceasefire line. Following calls by Georgian journalists on their Abkhaz counterparts and an appeal by the latter to the de facto Abkhaz leadership, the journalists were released on 6 March and handed over to UNOMIG, who transported them across the ceasefire line. After this release and a meeting between high-level military representatives from the CIS peacekeeping force and the Georgian side, the tensions abated and the sides withdrew additional personnel from the security zone.

Gali sector

20. Criminal incidents reported to UNOMIG patrols during the period under review included one killing, one attempted killing, one incident of arson and 10 robberies. A victim of one of the robberies later died in the hospital.

21. Following the release of the Georgian journalists, relatives of David Sigua and other Gali residents blocked the entrance to UNOMIG Gali sector headquarters to demand the assistance of UNOMIG in ascertaining his whereabouts.

22. From 29 February to 5 March, the Abkhaz side conducted military exercises, including in the Ochamchira area, which involved tanks, small arms and mortar firings. UNOMIG monitored some of these exercises. Three violation reports were issued for restricting UNOMIG's freedom of movement and for the presence of heavy military equipment in the restricted weapons zone.

23. On 18 March, the Abkhaz side claimed to have shot down a Georgian unmanned aerial vehicle off the coast of Ochamchira. UNOMIG was shown the recovered debris, which appeared to be from a midsize unmanned aerial vehicle. Previously, the de facto Abkhaz authorities also reported separate incidents of

violations of the Abkhaz-controlled airspace by Georgian unmanned aerial vehicles and warned of use of force if such overflights continued.

24. The United Nations police continued to liaise with the de facto Abkhaz law enforcement agencies in the Gali, Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli districts. It conducted 18 training courses for 104 de facto Abkhaz militia officers in traffic security, police tactics, forensics, police management and other policing skills, in addition to donating equipment and books.

25. The autumn conscription in the de facto Abkhaz armed forces in the Gali district ended in mid-January. The UNOMIG human rights officers followed up on two allegations of forceful recruitment and maintained contact with those recruits.

26. UNOMIG also continued to follow plans to issue Abkhaz "passports" to Gali district residents. While the de facto heads of administration and heads of villages have been instructed about the process, the issuing procedures are still unclear. The concern of the Mission is that Gali district residents should not be forced to renounce their nationality, which would be at variance with international human rights norms.

27. The Mission is following up on reports of compulsory labour, possibly involving intimidation and physical assault, in the Tkvarcheli and Ochamchira districts. It has raised the issue with the de facto Abkhaz authorities.

Zugdidi sector

28. The situation in the Zugdidi sector remained generally calm, but tensions arose in connection with the incidents mentioned in paragraph 19 of the present report.

29. Relatives and colleagues of the detained journalists staged demonstrations at the Inguri bridge and in front of the UNOMIG Zugdidi headquarters, temporarily blocking the Mission's movement.

30. From 29 February, UNOMIG observed significant reinforcement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs security posts, including the forward deployment of security forces in very close proximity of the ceasefire line. That triggered a reinforcement of its posts by the Abkhaz side (see para. 19 above). The CIS peacekeeping force increased its patrolling by establishing BTR armoured personnel carrier-mounted posts on both sides of the ceasefire line. UNOMIG urged that existing provisions establishing a minimum distance of 650 meters between positions of law enforcement structures and the line of separation of forces be observed. It also stressed the importance of observing the agreed limits on the number of security personnel in the security zone.

31. During the reporting period, the CIS peacekeeping force resumed patrolling in most of the security zone on the Georgian-controlled side. The Georgian side maintained that patrolling by the CIS peacekeeping force in the restricted weapons zone should be conducted only with prior notification. A number of tripartite meetings between the CIS peacekeeping force, the Georgian Ministries of Defence and Internal Affairs and UNOMIG have been taking place at the UNOMIG Zugdidi headquarters. These meetings were instrumental in de-escalating the situation in late February.

32. During the reporting period, UNOMIG continued to observe routine movements by the Ministry of Internal Affairs personnel and vehicles towards the upper Kodori Valley. Ground movements declined significantly compared to the previous reporting period. The number of aerial overflights, however, increased. UNOMIG issued five violation reports, which, for the most part, involved isolated military vehicles observed in the security zone.

33. Criminal incidents reported to UNOMIG patrols during the reporting period included two homicides, five abductions and eight robberies.

34. The United Nations police held 16 training courses in police tactics, self defence, suspect management, community policing, domestic violence, riot and crowd control, weapon handling, traffic police matters, and other policing skills for 151 police officers. It also organized a number of events within the framework of community policing and crime prevention programmes. The United Nations police conducted 29 joint patrols with local police within the security zone and made 164 monitoring visits to the local police facilities to assess the performance of local law enforcement agencies and to provide them with expert advice. The United Nations police also held 61 meetings with the Georgian police commanding staff on different policing-related matters and carried out public surveys on public security matters in different communities. It also donated equipment and books to the local police.

Kodori Valley

35. Severe weather conditions during the reporting period restricted UNOMIG activities in the Kodori Valley. The UNOMIG team in Adjara in the upper Kodori Valley was withdrawn twice: in late January and in February. Activities of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs personnel were reduced in mid-January, and many of the observed personnel rotations were performed by using air transport. Abkhaz activities in the lower Kodori Valley were also reduced.

Mission-wide developments

36. Weekly quadripartite meetings on security issues in the conflict zone remained suspended. The Joint Fact-Finding Group continued the investigation of the disappearance of David Sigua. To date, the Group has held seven meetings. During the last meeting, two witnesses provided further testimonies.

37. During the reporting period, UNOMIG continued consultations with the parties on the strengthening of its observation capacity, in particular through the deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles (see S/2008/38, paras. 39-41 and 57). The Chief Military Observer carried out several briefings to the two sides and the CIS peacekeeping force for this purpose.

IV. Cooperation with the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States

38. UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force continued to maintain close cooperation in the implementation of their respective mandates. The CIS

peacekeeping force continued to escort UNOMIG through the lower Kodori Valley during the regular rotation of the Mission personnel to and from its Kodori team base. The CIS peacekeeping force also provided assistance to UNOMIG temporary forward bases, which were established periodically on both sides of the ceasefire line.

V. Human rights issues

39. During the reporting period, the United Nations Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia, continued to promote human rights protection and to provide support to local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Office conducted regular monitoring visits to detention facilities, monitored court trials and provided legal advisory services to the local population. During the reporting period, the Office received 46 visitors in Sukhumi. The Office gathered first-hand information from victims, witnesses and other reliable sources. It monitored and followed up on individual cases related to due process and the right to a fair trial, the treatment of detainees, the illegal occupation of property, the right to adequate housing, and housing and property rights. The Office expressed concern at the treatment by the de facto authorities of the last remaining death-row inmate in Abkhazia. The Office closely monitored the detention conditions of the three ethnic Georgians apprehended on 26 February by the de facto Abkhaz State Security Services and released on 6 March (see para. 19 above). During daily visits to the detainees, none reported mistreatment while in custody. The Office also offered them legal advice.

40. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, visited Abkhazia, Georgia, during her visit to Georgia from 26 to 28 February. The High Commissioner met in Tbilisi with the Georgian President, the Ombudsman, other officials and representatives of the civil society. She also met with the de facto Abkhaz authorities and representatives of Abkhaz civil society in Sukhumi and Gali. Ms. Arbour urged the Abkhaz leadership to continue working towards sustainable rights-based solutions for internally displaced persons, with specific attention to protecting property rights. She also stressed the importance of providing education opportunities in the relevant mother tongues, and ensuring the right to freedom of movement for all local residents, including access to essential services and employment opportunities.

41. From 4 to 7 February, the Office, the Mission gender focal point and the United Nations police held a seminar in Pitsunda on the protection of women and minors against domestic violence. Twenty-two participants from the de facto Abkhaz Supreme Court, the General Prosecutor's Office, the Ministries of Interior, Justice and Education, NGOs and other entities took part in the seminar, which was conducted by the Ukrainian NGO La Strada Ukraine and the Ministry of the Interior of Ukraine.

VI. Humanitarian and rehabilitation activities

42. During the period under review, the Mission completed the rehabilitation of the power line in the village of Khamishkuri in the Khoba district and the restoration of water supplies to a school in Tsarche in the Tkvarcheli district. Approximately 1,500 households are expected to benefit from these projects.

Construction of a new police station in Lia village in the Tsalenjikha district continued, with the target completion date set for May 2008. A memorandum of understanding was signed with the de facto Head of Administration in Agu Gup in the Tkvarcheli district, to rehabilitate the village clinic. The Mission completed a four-month training project for 24 detainees at Dranda prison aimed at facilitating their future reintegration into society.

43. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) completed a livelihood programme funded by the European Commission and the Government of Norway, and started water system rehabilitation and income-generating activities in the Ochamchira, Tkvarcheli and Gali districts. UNDP also completed the rehabilitation of water supply systems in Kvemo Bargebi, Labra, Chlou-Mokva, Chai Sovhoz and Mahundzia, improving access to and quality of water for some 6,700 persons.

44. In February, the Georgian Government announced that it would collaborate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the framework of the "Strategic Directions", and expressed a special interest in community-based protection and confidence-building activities, education-related projects, basic shelter repair and income generation. UNHCR and its implementing partners — Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation — continued to implement activities as part of this strategy, including shelter, school and infrastructure rehabilitation, community mobilization, microcredit, income-generating and training activities, as well as firewood distribution to schools in Gali, Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli districts. The joint implementation of assistance projects encouraged interaction between returnee and local communities.

45. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) continued its efforts to improve the quality of and access to maternal and child health care. It provided technical assistance and medical equipment and supplies to health institutions in Abkhazia, Georgia, for the needs of child immunization campaigns. UNICEF continued to support greater protection for the most vulnerable children and young people from violence, abuse and exploitation. It completed the rehabilitation of a school in the Ochamchira district.

46. The World Food Programme, in collaboration with World Vision International, continued to assist the most vulnerable categories of the population through food-for-work and food-for-education programmes. Within the scope of food-for-education, take-home rations were provided to over 1,000 most at-risk children in 82 schools in Ochamchira, Tkvarcheli, Gali, Gulripshi and Sukhumi.

47. Save the Children continued to implement the United States Agency for International Development-funded STI/HIV prevention project in Abkhazia, Georgia. Over the reporting period, a number of training sessions were organized, which were aimed at strengthening local capacities in addressing HIV/AIDS in Abkhazia, Georgia. With financial support from UNHCR, Save the Children also delivered diagnostic test-kits and other medical and laboratory equipment. With funding from the European Commission Humanitarian Office and UNHCR, Première Urgence began implementing projects aimed at supporting farmers, craftsmen and traders, and rehabilitating 100 houses in Gali, Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli. It also completed the rehabilitation of two collective buildings in Tkvarcheli and four individual houses, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

VII. Support issues

48. During the reporting period, UNOMIG continued its HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaign. The Mission implemented the mandatory orientation programme of the Secretary-General on HIV/AIDS in the workplace, with training sessions held for the Mission staff. Materials were distributed and displayed in the Mission area.

49. The Conduct and Discipline Unit completed a misconduct risk assessment for the Mission, with corresponding recommendations. During the reporting period, incoming uniformed and civilian personnel continued to be briefed on gender equality in peacekeeping.

VIII. Financial aspects

50. The General Assembly, by its resolution 61/283 of 29 June 2007, appropriated the amount of $35 million for the maintenance of UNOMIG for the period from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of UNOMIG beyond 15 April 2008, the cost of maintaining the Observer Mission until 30 June 2008 would be limited to the amount approved by the General Assembly.

51. As at 31 December 2007, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNOMIG amounted to $18.4 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to $2,719.4 million.

52. Reimbursement for medical facilities provided to UNOMIG by the Government of Germany has been made for the period until 31 December 2006. As at 20 March 2008, the amount owed for the medical facilities totalled $88,648.

IX. Observations

53. While the past three months have witnessed moments of tension between the two sides, the overall assessment by UNOMIG of the security situation in its area of responsibility continues to indicate its relative stability. This is a welcome development that contrasts favourably with the same period last year. I also welcome the dialogue between the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, the CIS peacekeeping force and UNOMIG, which has been taking place regularly on the Zugdidi side of the ceasefire line. I hope that this dialogue will soon be supplemented by the resumption of regular meetings on security issues involving the Georgian and Abkhaz sides.

54. Indeed, every effort must be made to ensure that this positive trend continues, including through the strict observance of agreed rules constraining the deployment of forces of both sides in the security zone. The high tensions that characterized much of 2006 and 2007 have not served the interest of the peace process. Quite the contrary, they have contributed to further narrowing the opportunities for a dialogue already undercut by deep mutual suspicions. A period of sustained stability along the ceasefire line and in the Kodori Valley would improve the prospect of repairing the much deteriorated relationship between the two sides. The United Nations

continues to monitor and verify that the situation in the conflict zone is in compliance with the relevant agreements and Security Council resolutions.

55. In this respect, the steps proposed by the Group of Friends in 2007 and discussed again at the last Geneva meeting on 18 and 19 February are particularly relevant and, like the Friends, I regret that hardly any progress has been made so far in their implementation. In this respect, I can only stress the view, borne out by years of United Nations peacemaking experience, that small steps and partial successes are essential to the sustainability of protracted peace processes, and the Georgian-Abkhaz process certainly qualifies as such. I have taken note of the fact that during the Geneva meeting a measure of common ground emerged in this respect, with both sides acknowledging the possibility of a gradual restoration of working relations between them across a range of issues. Implementation, as always, will be key. I have noted with satisfaction the readiness of the members of the Group of Friends to assist the sides in this regard, and I express the willingness of the United Nations to support them in making this approach work.

56. I have outlined in my previous report (S/2008/38) the difficulties with which the peace process is currently confronted. These difficulties, as well as the increasingly complex external environment, remain and inevitably affect the role of UNOMIG. At the same time, as in the past, developments on the ground during the reporting period under review continued to highlight the importance of the presence of the Mission for promoting stability in the zone of conflict, practical cooperation between the sides and the restoration of dialogue. I therefore recommend an extension of the mandate of UNOMIG for a further period of six months, until 15 October 2008.

57. I conclude by expressing my appreciation to my Special Representative, Jean Arnault, and the staff of UNOMIG for their persistent efforts. I thank the Group of Friends, whose involvement is essential to the viability of my own efforts, and to the many Member States and international organizations that continue to contribute to the peace process.

Annex

Countries providing military observers (as at 25 March 2008)

Country	*Military observers*
Albania	3
Austria	2
Bangladesh	8
Croatia	3
Czech Republic	5
Denmark	5
Egypt	6
France	3
Germany	12
Ghana	1
Greece	5
Hungary	7
Indonesia	4
Jordan	7
Lithuania	2
Moldova	1
Mongolia	1
Nepal	1
Nigeria	1
Pakistan	10*
Poland	5
Republic of Korea	7
Romania	2
Russian Federation	4
Sweden	3
Switzerland	4
Turkey	5
Ukraine	5
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	5
United States of America	2
Uruguay	3
Yemen	1
Total	**134**

* Including the Chief Military Observer.

Countries providing civilian police personnel (as at 25 March 2008)

Country	*Civilian police*
Czech Republic	2
Germany	4
Ghana	1
Philippines	2
Poland	2
Russian Federation	2
Sweden	2
Switzerland	2
Ukraine	1*
Total	**18**

* Including the Senior Police Adviser.

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Department of Field Support
Cartographic Section